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Herausgegeben von
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in Verbindung mit
Önay Sözer und Alper Turken

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Mario Farina, Milano

The Symbolic Role of Art in Hegel versus the Absolute Function of Beauty

Hegel's theory of art is generally condensed into two main claims that have been critically elaborated and interpreted in various ways over the last two centuries: i) Art is a form of presentation of the absolute spirit, and ii) a successful work of fine art displays a thoroughgoing identity of form and content. These two generic tenets have contributed to build the image of Hegel as one of the fathers of classicist aesthetics, or better, as the philosopher who gave theoretical dignity and a speculative foundation to the theory stating the absolute excellence of classical Greek art.¹

The first claim concerns the systematic and philosophical determination of art: it specifies the relationship between art and the absolute. This kind of conceptualization simultaneously establishes the relationship that art maintains with the other forms of comprehension of the absolute spirit, i. e. religion and philosophy, and it concerns the absolute function of beauty. The second claim, on the contrary, closely concerns the field of aesthetics, and its reception has affected a large part of the aesthetic theories in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The Hegelian verdict concerns the aesthetic category of beauty and it asserts the perfect identity between form and content.

When we read Hegel's dual determination of art, however, a sort of mutual tension stands out in its theoretical implications: if it is true that absolute spirit is the content of art, and if it is also true that art is a sensible presentation of spirit, the postulated identity of form and content undermines the Hegelian conception of the absoluteness of spirit. The absolute spirit is in fact infinite rationality, and its absoluteness (*ab-solutus*) involves a complete autonomy and freedom: the absolute spirit is free from the sensible bonds of matter and its infinite freedom is such that it is unintelligible in the immediate medium of art. In order to explicate this tension we have to understand what the „identity of form and content“ actually means, and how art can possibly refer to the absoluteness of spirit. To anticipate my conclusions, I support the following position: The semantic category that best explains the relationship between form and content, the incarnation of meaning, in Hegel's aesthetics is the category of the symbol.

1 The beginning of the system and the role of art

In the third systematic project, developed by Hegel in Jena (1805/6), art has – for the first time in his works – the same role later assigned to it in the *Heidelberger* and *Berliner Encyclopedia*: art is the first part of the absolute spirit, and it will be overcome by religion and philosophy (here called Science).

However, in this context it is crucial to note the kind of expressions Hegel uses to describe the connection between art and spirit. He writes that „it [the spirit] is immediately art“,² and a few lines later: „art produces the world as spiritual, and for the intuition“. ³ Art is indeed the immediate and sensible way in which the spirit creates itself; art is, according to the same text, a „quiet

¹ Against this interpretation see: A. Gethmann-Siefert, „Hegels These von Ende der Kunst und der ‚Klassizismus‘ der Ästhetik“, In: *Hegel-Studien*, 19 (1984), 205–258.

² G. W. F. Hegel, *Jenaer Systementwürfe III*, Hamburg, 1976, 278.

³ Ibid, 279.

Paul Cruysberghs, Leuven

Mood against Reason? From Hegel via Kierkegaard to Heidegger

One of the topics that are still underestimated in Hegel's thought is the section on anthropology in his philosophy of subjective spirit. The subject of Hegel's anthropology is the soul. In contrast with the Cartesian tradition, Hegel does not identify the soul with spirit or consciousness; nor does he oppose it to the body. It refers more to psychosomatic processes than to what Gilbert Ryle described as activities of a ghost in a machine. In line with German handbooks of anthropology, Hegel considered human nature not just as an essence, but also and primarily as a natural, i. e. psychosomatic being. It is striking that Hegel paid so much attention to anthropology in his lectures on subjective spirit; not just because it was the first part of the lectures, but also, as Michael John Petry has shown in his English-German edition of the lectures, because he was particularly interested in the topic, keeping himself informed of the most recent literature on the subject.¹ Personally, I consider Hegel's anthropology as a confirmation of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's appraisal of Hegel (in his chapter on 'Hegel's Existentialism' in *Sens et non-sens*) as offering „une raison élargie“ (an expanded reason).² According to Merleau-Ponty, this was sufficient reason to place Hegel at the origin of „all the great philosophical ideas of the past century“.³ Surely, in line with the French tradition of Jean Hyppolite, Merleau-Ponty had Hegel's *Phenomenology* in mind, but with certain qualifications one can enlarge Merleau-Ponty's appreciative words to Hegel's treatment of anthropology as well, in which he attempts „to explore the irrational and integrate it into an expanded reason“, an undertaking which, according to Merleau-Ponty, „remains the task of our century“.⁴

What I want to explore in this paper is the way Hegel does indeed try to integrate what Merleau-Ponty calls the irrational into an expanded reason. In other words, I am interested in the „how“ of this integration. I want to show that this integration gives a place to the irrational, but that it remains a rather poor one after all. Indeed, in spite of Hegel speaking sometimes in terms of sublation [*Aufhebung*], the irrational is just there in order to be negated, or even forgotten, as soon as possible. For that very reason I will appeal to Kierkegaard and Heidegger, who, according to my interpretation, have a more sophisticated view of the so-called irrational dimension of human experience.

1 Hegel against Hegel: Mood against Spirit (or The Other Way Around)

Instead of speaking in terms of the irrational, which as a matter of fact is too broad a notion, I prefer to focus more particularly on the notion of *mood* (*Stimmung*). Technically speaking, Hegel does not explicitly introduce the notion of mood, in so far as the term does not appear as a subtitle

1 M. J. Petry, *Hegels Philosophie des subjektiven Geistes; Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, 3 vols, Dordrecht 1977.

2 M. Merleau-Ponty, *Sens et Non-sens*, Paris 1948, 109; *Sense and Non-Sense*, tr. by H. L. Deyfus and P. A. Dreyfus, Evanston 1964, 63.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

in the anthropology section of the *Encyclopaedia*. Still, this does not prevent him from mentioning moods on several occasions, mostly connecting them with the accidental and the temporary. Moods are affections of the mind, depending on so-called external perceptions. Insofar as they depend on the external, they change together with it. More particularly, Hegel connects our moods to changes in what he calls planetary life.⁵ Different seasons or different moments of the day (like night and day, morning and evening, or the weather) can arouse different moods. Being susceptible of particular moods is part of human nature and it is closely connected with nature as such.

The closer a human being is to nature, the more he is in sympathy with it, the more he is dependent on the mood of the moment. As a consequence, Hegel opposes conscious thinking and willing, being the proper functions of spirit as such, to the unconscious determinations of the mind by the external world (which as a matter of fact is not external as such on the level of the perceptive and feeling soul, since the latter is still in a kind of immediate unity with its corporeity and the world). While consciously thinking and willing, the spirit shows its independence from its natural context. In that perspective, Hegel privileges the spiritual development of the Western, especially the Nordic culture over against that of Southern, especially African peoples, who live closer to nature and are therefore more dependent on it. Sure, they might have the privilege of an immediate, magical awareness of things, to be compared to animals which may for example have a presentiment of imminent earthquakes.⁶ But on the other hand they are lacking the spiritual freedom that comes with independence from passing moods.

It is not by accident that Hegel likes to stress the importance of an institution like marriage, even though it is based on a particular, natural inclination of both parties. The reason is clear: marriage prevents love, Hegel says in his *Philosophy of Right*, from being subjected to the arbitrariness and the temporality of the moods.⁷

Again, in his *Aesthetics* Hegel is well aware of the fact that the beauty of a landscape or the sublime character of a stormy sea or a grandiose chain of mountains works on the mood of its admirers.⁸ And of course, like religious rituals, art works may also have an effect on the moods of their perceivers. Especially lyric poetry⁹ and even more so music (the German term of *Stimmung* immediately refers to the realm of the auditive) are not just expressions of the mood of the poet or the composer, but they appeal to the mood of the listeners as well.¹⁰ Hence, far from neglecting this affective dimension of the human mind, Hegel acknowledges its function and its power. Still, here again Hegel explicitly establishes a hierarchy, reducing the importance of moods in favor of higher forms of psychological attitudes. The aesthetic appreciation of nature plays only a minimal role in Hegel's aesthetics; music as an art is inferior to poetry and lyric poetry in particular has to recognize drama as having a superior position. Time and again, it is the earnestness of the content, i. e. the freedom of spirit, that determines the ultimate aesthetic quality of works of art. Such a content can be moving, to be sure; it can appeal to the mood of the art lover, yes; but it is on the higher spiritual level of *Anschauung*, of intuition, and *Vorstellung*, representation, that works of art are to be appreciated.

As far as religion is concerned, Hegel is among the first philosophers to give a logical place and appraisal of natural religions in which an immediate, magical relationship to nature is to be considered as a first expression of the power and the superiority of spirit over nature: namely in

5 G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundriß* (1830), in: *Gesammelte Werke* [GW] 20, § 392; *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Geistes*, in: *Vorlesungen. Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte* [V], 13, 36; *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des subjektiven Geistes*, GW 25/1, 31.

6 See also *Nürnberger Gymnasialkurse und Gymnasialreden* (1808–1816), GW 10, 434.

7 *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, GW 14/1, § 176.

8 *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst*, V 2, 62; cf. also 201; 255 f.

9 Ibid., 282.

10 *Vorlesungen über Aesthetik* (Berlin 1820/1821), ed. by H. Schneider, Frankfurt/M. 1995, 279. In *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst*, V 2, 265f Hegel – not speaking in terms of moods – stresses the fact that *Empfindung*, sensation/feeling is the subject of music.

the religion of magic.¹¹ And the magician does not just exercise power over nature but over human beings as well. Still, when further considering this power of the magician over nature and other human beings, Hegel explains that it is only natural desire which is dominant in both his theoretical and practical behavior. The magician is not able to distinguish between the universality of law and duty on the one hand and subjective arbitrariness, desire, and inclination on the other. That is why Hegel speaks in terms of *Dumpfheit* (dullness) and *Stumpfheit* (obtuseness, stupidity) on the theoretical, and *Wildheit* (wildness) on the practical level. „It is only the first, wild resting of the spirit in itself“, he says, which is to be interpreted as meaning that spirit is here nothing more than the natural soul, subjected to moods, sensations, feelings, and natural desires.¹²

But not only the so-called primitive forms of religion dwell at the level of moods and feelings. Hegel is well aware of the fact that what he calls free religion, such as Christianity, also appeals to moods in its rituals and prayers.¹³ It is not by accident that he pays so much attention to devotion (*Andacht*) in his philosophy of religion. Still, he stresses Christianity's spiritual content, which speaks to the hearts of the people, to be sure, but whose rational content is primary, even when it is expressed in the form of representations – inferior to the philosophical conceptuality, but highly spiritual all the same.

How should we characterize the way Hegel deals with the functions of the soul, especially with its moods? Hegel recognizes them to be somehow basic: they are present in every human situation, they have a place of their own, but they should never be allowed to become dominant at either the theoretical or the practical level. Moods are present at every level, but even the architectonic of Hegel's system already suggests that spirit has to sublimate them, to negate and to preserve them. Merleau-Ponty might say: to integrate them. And there are good reasons for saying so: if we had to depend on the arbitrariness of the moods, if indeed our good humor exclusively depended on the weather, if human relationships were as volatile as some people's moods, if music's only function were to put us in the right mood (as muzak is supposed to do in many of today's restaurants), human culture would hardly be superior to the life of animals.

But is this enough? Should we be content with that? In order to go at least one step further I appeal to two later authors, to Kierkegaard and then also to Heidegger.

2 Kierkegaard: Being in the Right Mood

Beginning with his master's thesis on *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard appears to be extremely sensitive to the issue of moods. In his thesis he describes the position of the modern ironist (and here he is mainly thinking of romantic irony)¹⁴ as someone whose „life is *nothing but moods*“ that are shifting all the time.¹⁵ Sure, the ironist considers himself to be the author of his own moods: he thinks he has them under control and he interprets their continuous change as evoked by himself. But this is mere illusion, Kierkegaard argues. He actually describes the ironist's moods in line with Hegel's diagnosis: the ironist succumbs to moods that are merely temporary and accidental. And he suggests that the healthy way of dealing with them is to master them. „In a sound and healthy

11 *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, V 4a, 177.

12 *Ibid.*, 435.

13 *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, in: *Vorlesungsmanuskripte II (1816–1831)*, GW 18, 80; see also V 6, 69.

14 When dealing with romantic irony Kierkegaard refers to Schlegel, Tieck, and Solger.

15 S. Kierkegaard, *Om Begrebet Ironi* (BI), SKS 1, 319; *The Concept of Irony* (CI), HH 284. When quoting Kierkegaard's works I refer to *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, Copenhagen [SKS], followed by the standard English translation edited by H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong, Princeton [HH], using the common sigla.

life“, he argues, „the mood is just an intensification of the life that ordinarily stirs and moves within a person.“¹⁶ And Kierkegaard is well aware of the fact that this intensification is not something that lies completely within one's power. Therefore he speaks in terms of „humbling oneself under them“¹⁷ as being the true way of mastering them.

In *Either-Or* the diagnosis of moods does not change dramatically. The aesthete now takes the place of the ironist, trying to manipulate and gain power over his moods.¹⁸ And that is not just the opinion of A, the aesthete himself, but also that of B, i. e. Judge William who represents the ethical perspective of life. „You [i. e. A] hover above your self“, he says, „and what you see down below you is a multiplicity of moods and conditions that you make use of in order to find interesting contacts with life.“¹⁹ Hovering is indeed the image Kierkegaard also makes use of in *The Concept of Irony* to describe the position of the ironist. And further on William argues: „The person who lives esthetically tries as far as possible to be engrossed [*at gaae op*] completely in mood.“²⁰ Consequently, the aesthetic personality is always caught up in the instant, succumbing to the fluctuations of the moment. The aesthetic mood is always excentric, it has its centre in the periphery. The ethical person, by contrast, has his centre in himself and his mood is centralized. This is the case because „he has chosen himself infinitely“ and as a consequence „he sees his mood beneath him.“²¹ The ethical person does not exterminate the mood, but neither is he submerged in it. Taking a moment of distance, looking at it for a moment, he is able to master it. As such, „he is not in the mood, and he is not mood, but he has mood and has the mood within himself.“ Kierkegaard continues: „What he [the ethical person] works for is continuity, and this is always the master of mood. His life does not lack mood – indeed, it has a total mood [*Total-Stemning*]. But this is acquired; it is what would be called *aequale temperamentum* [even disposition]. But this is not esthetic mood, and no person has it by nature or immediately.“²²

Again, this ethical perspective is not essentially different from the Hegelian position, polemical as it is against any form of romantic or aesthetic exaltation of the moods. It is interesting, however, in that it offers quite a detailed analysis of the way people can either be the slaves of their moods while having the illusion of mastering them (as the ironic and aesthetic personalities do) or master them effectively by deciding to choose oneself as an ethical self that is capable of giving itself continuity in life.

In Kierkegaard's *Journal FF* however, we find an appreciation of mood that definitely goes beyond the Hegelian perspective. There Kierkegaard says: „What will be the crucial point – which, if done properly, will become the classicism of our times – is continuity of mood, rather than continuity of concept.“²³ The quote shows how, according to Kierkegaard, (contemporary) culture is to be interpreted in terms of moods rather than in conceptual terms – and this is new.

In *The Concept of Anxiety*, which is the book that influenced Heidegger more than any of Kierkegaard's other works, we can see how Kierkegaard's appreciation of mood confirms the change of perspective announced in the *Journal* passage. The question here is no longer how to master the moods with the help of ethical choice. What matters now is to be in the right mood, not to master moods in general. Johannes Haufniensis, the pseudonymous author of *The Concept of Anxiety*, indeed distinguishes between a true mood and an untrue one.²⁴ And then the question is that of being in the true mood in the right context. Different concepts appear to require adequate moods, otherwise things are going wrong. It is the mood that shows whether one has understood

16 BI SKS 1, 319; CI HH 284.

17 BI SKS 1, 320; CI HH 284.

18 EE1 SKS 2, 287; EO1 HH 298–299.

19 EE2 SKS 3, 192; EO2 HH 199.

20 EE2 SKS 3, 219–220; EO2 HH 229.

21 EE2 SKS 3, 220; EO2 HH 230.

22 EE2 SKS 3, 220; EO2 HH 230.

23 *Journals FF*, 92: SKS 18, 94; *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, Princeton [KJN] 2, 86.

24 BA SKS 4, 322; CA 14.

a particular concept well. Hence there is at least a certain correspondence between mood and concept, if not a priority of one (the mood) over the other (the concept). The concept Haufniensis has in mind in *The Concept of Anxiety* is that of sin. And thus he shows extensively how different moods fit together with different conceptions of sin, the only adequate conception being the religious one, which is at home at the level of preaching, and the only adequate mood being that of earnestness. It is only in the mood of earnestness that sin is conceived in the right way.

In a footnote, Haufniensis shows that the mood does not only have to correspond properly to the correct concept. He affirms explicitly that moods are to be *presupposed* by conceptual thinking. Not just poetry and art, he argues, but also science „presupposes a mood in the creator as well as in the observer“.²⁵ Moods are not just concomitant with scientific approaches; they are presupposed by it. To put it simply: one does not start up scientific research without being in the right mood. Hence there must be a certain kind of anteriority of the mood to spiritual activities like doing scientific research, producing art works, or enjoying them. Apart from the question whether we can modify our moods, whether we are able of putting ourselves in the right mood, and how we can do so, we must take into account that there is a priority of moods over against higher spiritual activities. A particular mood creates a particular disposition and it is necessary in order to perform on the scientific or the artistic level.

3 Heidegger: *Dasein* is Disclosed Moodwise

This being said, I want to make a last move, a move towards Heidegger, who, according to a famous footnote in *Being and Time*, somewhat surprisingly says that he appreciates Kierkegaard's *Edifying Discourses* in the first place – but also – and this is less surprising – *The Concept of Anxiety*.²⁶ Now, in § 29 of *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger introduces an analysis of *Dasein*, being-there, as *Befindlichkeit*, somewhat oddly translated into English by Macquarrie and Robinson as „state-of-mind“.²⁷ *Befindlichkeit*, Heidegger argues, is the ontological expression of what is ontically expressed in terms of *Stimmung* or *Gestimmtsein*, of mood or being-attuned. The move from an ontic analysis, which would find its place in psychology, to an ontological one that considers the mood as an *Existential*, is what makes Heidegger into a thinker who adds something substantial to both Hegel's and Kierkegaard's anthropologies of the mood. Heidegger shows that our being-in-the-world lights up in and through the trivial experiences of being in a mood. Also, Heidegger recognizes the fact that we slip over from one mood to the other, that moods are fleeting, but „the fact that moods can deteriorate and change over means simply that in every case *Dasein* always has some mood [*gestimmt ist*]“.²⁸ Heidegger stresses indeed that mood is not just something that is always there, but also that it performs a certain kind of disclosure, one that is primordial to knowledge and that as such cannot be known in the conceptual meaning of the word. In the disclosure of the moods *Dasein* is brought before its being as *da*‘. „A mood makes manifest ,how one is, and how one is faring‘ [*wie einem ist und wird*]. In this ,how one is‘, having a mood brings Being to its ,there‘.“²⁹ And further: „In having a mood, *Dasein* is always disclosed moodwise as that entity to which it has been delivered over in its Being; and in this way it has been delivered over to the Being which, in existing, it has to be.“³⁰ Most of the time we are not aware of or do not pay

²⁵ BA SKS 4, 322n; CA 14n.

²⁶ Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* [SZ], Tübingen 1967, 235; English edition: *Being and Time* [BT], tr. by J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Oxford 2001, 494.

²⁷ SZ 134; BT 172.

²⁸ SZ 134; BT 173.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

attention to this ontologico-existential disclosure of *Dasein*, but even then „*Dasein* is unveiled in its Being-delivered-over to the ,there‘. In the evasion of itself the ,there‘ is something disclosed.“³¹ Thus the moods disclose the „that it is“ or the thrownness [*Geworfenheit*] of the being in its there. It is in and through the moods that *Dasein* finds itself in its thrownness.

It is clear that Heidegger is interested neither in psychological nor in ethical questions. He does not want to catalogue different kinds of moods nor is he interested in the question whether and how we are able to master our moods with the help of knowledge or will. He acknowledges that this is possible and that in certain circumstances one must and ought to master the moods.³² His point is that mood is a primordial kind of being for *Dasein*, in which the latter „is disclosed to itself *prior* to all cognition and volition, and *beyond* their range of disclosure“.³³ And on top of that he suggests that in any case mastering a particular mood always requires a counter-mood. In other words, we are never free of moods.

If we now return to Hegel, I think he would agree with this last statement. Moods are always there, also when we are behaving in a rational way. In that sense, Hegel acknowledges the basic presence of psychosomatic experiences. They are our most basic relationships to the world, prior to conscious knowing and willing. Yet his endeavor to show that ethical life, art, religion, and science have a content and form beyond the psychosomatic, seems to have blinded him to what he himself acknowledged as primordial, the basic relation of the human being to the world. To be sure, his emphasis on the role of reason commits him to a number of reductionist conceptions of ethics, religion and art; but even so, it is clear that Kierkegaard and especially Heidegger had a more open and at the same time, I am tempted to say, a more humble conception of our being in the world than Hegel had. I am afraid that it will not be enough to use Hegel's anthropology in order to argue against his psychology, his theory of spirit as such, being the third part of his philosophy of subjective spirit. The least we can say is that both Kierkegaard and Heidegger opened up perspectives that remained either repressed or at least un-thought in Hegel's thought.

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³¹ SZ 135; BT 174.

³² SZ 136; BT 175.

³³ Ibid.